1

BATTLE

Expectation, Encounter, Reaction

One expects to find in war a killing power. What American soldiers in World War II failed to foresee was that battle also possessed a power to impose thorough and dramatic change on those whom it did not kill. To continue in combat exposed the body and the mind to the hammerings of a behemoth; its blows seemed to pound away individual variation, to compel submission, and to portend a collective, ever-pliant combat personality.

In the event, even amid coerced change, American soldiers demonstrated an adaptability that, weighed against the force bearing hard on them, was often astonishing. They reacted in a medley of ways; sometimes they invested in logic, sometimes in magic, often in both. Even when those longest in combat felt that they were losing all efficacy, they continued to make choices.

The passages below try to describe the collision of American soldiers with the forces of the battlefield and to trace the repercussions of the combat experience, particularly in infantrymen's feelings of abandonment and expendability. The chapter that follows explores how soldiers attempted to withstand battle, and measures the outcome of their efforts.

In light of the American public's initial view of the war as a distasteful necessity, soldiers anticipated combat with what today seems an unlikely receptivity. Following basic training, they believed themselves ready for battle, were impatient to engage the enemy, minimized their adversaries' capacities to oppose them, and seldom worried about the results either for themselves or for their country. An exuberant aggressiveness infused their words and actions.

Most felt a powerful impulse to close on the enemy without delay. Private Mario Sabatelli spoke for those Marine Raiders with whom he moved toward the invasion of Tulagi: "We wanted to get our hands on Japs." A seaman whose combat station was a machine-gun mount on a light cruiser declared en route to Guadalcanal that "I came out here to see action and I hope this is the biggest battle of all time. . . . I . . . don't care how many Japs I run into." Army private Morton Eustis worried that there would not be combat enough to satisfy him: "I'm so scared Germany may sue for peace before we have a chance to take a crack at her. . . ." Such sentiments drew their keenness from dissatisfaction with the pre-combat present, from soldiers' confidence that they would realize the gratifications of combat and from the conviction that battle, entered upon as quickly and as unrestrainedly as possible, represented the fastest "road back to America."[1]

Impatience to fight trailed closely the conviction of many that their training ensured success in battle. Said Sabatelli on the eve of Tulagi: "We felt good. . . . I felt cool and confident. My feeling was that it was going to be tough, but after the training we'd had I felt this was my business and I was ready for it." When the troops with whom Ernie Pyle was traveling—as a correspondent for the Scripps-Howard newspaper chain—landed on Sicily and encountered no enemy resistance, there was disappointment, for they thought themselves "trained to such a point that instead of being pleased with no opposition they were thoroughly annoyed."[2]

Others, whatever they considered their training's effectiveness, simply could no longer tolerate its irksomeness. Eustis wrote from England in April 1944: "I don't credit the Army with being sufficiently far-sighted to make their training so boring that men are really anxious to go into combat just to get away from it, but that is actually what happens." And the simple termination of training did not suffice; the interval between training and battle—mere waiting, in the men's view—was worse, one of the war's most unendurable stages. Eustis spoke to this point, too: "I don't believe there's a man in our company who wouldn't rather be under enemy fire than in garrison over here [in England]. And I know that they're itching to get going and get this over with, rather than to sit around for months and even years."[3]

To those who thought themselves ready to fight, activity designated to fill the interim was intolerable make-work. When a Marine private refused orders to continue laboring in the hold of a ship anchored off Guadalcanal, the captain to whom his dereliction was reported was curious. "You volunteered, you know. You didn't have to come out here. Why did you enlist?" "To fight, Sir. . . . I've been working all the way across [the Pacific], swabbing decks, cleaning heads. I've spent twelve hours down there in the hold today, while some of them goldbricks that ain't done a tap got to go ashore with the first detail. I've done more than my share and I ain't taking any more pushing around." He had come to the southwest Pacific "to get me some Japs—not work as a stevedore." Others like him looked forward to battle as relief from camp or shipboard life, as action that would deliver them from insufferable inaction.[4]

Some found ways other than insubordination to quell their impatience. Basic training taught no lesson more convincingly than "Don't volunteer!" and James Johns "knew better" than to do so, but when Admiral William Halsey himself asked for fifty men to offer to service Marine aircraft in the eye of combat on Guadalcanal, he stepped forward. Geddes Mumford, a messenger at battalion headquarters, hastened his way into the fight. "[E]very time he was given a message to deliver, he wandered off with his rifle to hunt for Germans or to attach himself to a rifle company in the lines."[5]

Those compelled to wait envied those who were about to see or had already seen battle. Eustis, eager for combat but counting days in a North African replacement depot, was jealous of two tent-mates—"the lucky devils"—who were sent to the front. A Marine private, a replacement on Guadalcanal, complained that "Other guys . . . have [already] had personal, hand-to-hand fights with the Japs, but not me. Somehow, I don't get those breaks." In a Honolulu bar, James Jones, while a soldier training in Hawaii, met crewmen of the carrier *Yorktown,* which had just fought in the Battle of the Coral Sea and was doomed soon to go down at Midway. All three sailors were "curiously sun-blackened and with deep hollow eyes" and "drunk as hoot owls" at nine o'clock in the morning. At his first glance, Jones realized that they were "different from me." He stayed with them for hours, listening to their battle stories. They "had already passed on into a realm I had never seen." Jones, an enlistee in the peacetime Regular Army, was not as impatient as most to enter battle's domain, but as for those fighting sailors, "The whole encounter had been immensely romantic for me" and "More than anything in the world I wanted to be like them."[6]

Such comments reflected minds unintimidated by the prowess of the enemy or the prospect of death. To very few did their opponents appear formidable; indeed, Americans approached their enemies with a nonchalance edging on disdain. So little concerned with the opposition's lethal power was

Joseph Miller, an engineer officer in North Africa, that he found the opening round of German machine-gun and artillery fire "just sort of exciting" and carried on with his sergeant "a race" to determine who would become the first wounded and thus "get the first Purple Heart." Morton Eustis deemed the Italians worth hardly a thought. It was "humiliating" that Italian soldiers—"if you can dignify them by the name"—cried "like sniveling babies" and were so eager to surrender. As for the Germans, Eustis hoped that he and his friends "can each knock out at least a hundred Jerries apiece . . . just as a starter." He would dedicate the first German cut down to his mother and the second to his brother. "If I don't kill at least ten personally, I shall be most unhappy!"[7]

In the Pacific, Army sergeant Myles Standish Babcock, embarking for Guadalcanal, said much the same about his enemy. "Intensely desirous of going into combat . . . I'd like to kill ten Japs, then become a casualty of sufficient importance to justify convalescence in New Zealand or even the United States of America!" Aboard another vessel bound for Guadalcanal, U.S. correspondent Richard Tregaskis listened as Marines loaded cartridges into machine-gun belts. "One of them kept time with the clink of the belter. 'One, two, three, another Jap for me,' he said. Others tried other ideas. . . . Another boy said, 'Honorable bullet take honorable Jap honorable death. So solly.' 'I've got a Jap's name written on each bullet. There's three generals among 'em.' 'Which one's for Tojo?'. . . 'Oh, Hell, the first one's got his name on it.'"[8]

Partner to this insouciance sometimes bordering on frivolousness was sterner stuff—a hard, comprehensive, but very abstract vindictiveness. When family members wrote to Eustis of their misgivings about the American bombing of German towns, he disparaged all qualms. "God knows, I don't advocate the wholesale slaughter of enemy civilians in cold blood, though, in the case of Germany, some of that medicine won't do them any harm. But if civilians must be killed to attain your objective, why then there's nothing to do but kill them. . . . I think the Germans . . . should suffer. . . . The simple solution of the problem—complete extermination of the German people—is, I realize, a consummation that can never be realized, however devoutly [I wish it]." It is difficult to measure the depth of conviction to which such disdain and vengefulness reached, but those soldiers who offered dire prescriptions seldom expected them to receive serious consideration, nor was any ordinarily given. Much of what soldiers said was intended to bolster the exuberance of their war talk.[9]

Equally emboldening was the soldier's conviction that he need not worry much about his own death in battle. Psychiatrist Jules Masserman has identified faith in personal survival as one of the master beliefs undergirding the individual's psychic defense against war's destructiveness, and there is persuasive evidence of World War II recruits' certainty of their invulnerability. "You hear of casualties, see casualties, and read of casualties," explained a member of an Army ordnance unit in North Africa, "but you believe it will never happen to you." In a letter written on the eve of the invasion of Iwo Jima, Marine private James Bruce assured his wife that "[N]othing could make [him] really, fundamentally believe that a bullet or chunk of bomb or shell might suddenly rip the life out of [him]." Roger Hilsman remembered how his group of twelve, aboard a ship sailing for Bombay and destined for grim service with Merrill's Marauders in Burma, hooted at a suggestion that any one of them could be wounded in the approaching fighting. All comprehended intellectually that woundings and dyings constituted war, but those not yet under fire proceeded as if each had been granted some fundamental exemption.[10]

Soldiers who survived first combat realized how profound had been their conviction of imperishability. Just ashore on Guadalcanal, Marine Grady Gallant deliberated on what would happen if Japanese aircraft attacking American ships in the roadstead shifted targets. "What horror it would be . . . if they [were to] strafe our beachhead and bomb it. . . . The men and supplies were still confined to a rather small area. . . . Bombs and machine guns could kill most of us, or wound us, and there would be no help for us against a thing we could not fight, or stop, or avenge. This possibility froze my blood." As Marine Eugene Sledge realized, "The fact that our lives might end violently or that we might be crippled while we were still boys didn't seem to register."[11]

With many so resistant to any thought of personal jeopardy, the few in whom disquietude appeared early were ordinarily able to draw reassurance from within (". . . if I die . . . [But] that is stupid thinking, a part of myself told the other part, you are not going to die. That is the way to look at it, the only way") or from friends ("You know somebody's going to get it, but not [us].")[12]

Widespread enthusiasm for closing and grappling with the enemy and obliviousness to one's own mortality did not relieve soldiers of all anxiety. One immediately pressing concern was peculiar: Convinced that he would not die in battle, the soldier still worried that those important to him could. "The other fellow will get it, not me." But what if the other fellow were a comrade? Even this was a source of only minor alarm. Bonds among those approaching battle were weaker than they would become as a result of battle.

The emphasis remained on death passing by the self rather than striking others close by, and the soldier's anticipation of the destruction of friends served principally to reassert the certainty of his own survival. As Marine private Allen Matthews put it, "Of course we knew that fatalities might and probably would occur, but in our mind's eye we saw ourselves grieving over the loss of friends and we never could picture our friends grieving over us." One story, as popular as it was apocryphal, illustrated how the soldier accommodated the certainty that he would survive with the certainty that war killed soldiers. Prior to an assault, a battalion commander "stood in front of his men . . . and painted a picture of impending doom. 'By tomorrow morning . . . every man here, except one, will be dead.' The remark bit deeply into every man present, and each glanced at his comrades with undisguised compassion. 'Gee,' each man thought to himself, 'those poor fellows.' "[13]

A more pressing concern of the soldier was his own performance in battle. Morton Eustis, just assigned to an armored division, included in a letter home an apprehension that many felt. He was worried "not whether I'm killed, wounded or taken prisoner . . . but how well I acquit myself when I come up against the real thing." The conception of combat as a test of the individual had lost most of its specificity and some of its gravity since Theodore Roosevelt and his Rough Riders had demonstrated its centrality to the combat of the Spanish-American War, but an aura of its influence remained and some of its precepts continued to circulate: that combat was the ultimate test of the soldier's courage and manhood; that it tried the soul but would purify successful participants; that it confirmed character by strengthening the strong and by diminishing further the already weak. Such beliefs no longer received serious attention at home. No one had challenged departing soldiers to "Be brave!" as had family and friends at the outset of the Civil War. The test had largely lost its social dimension. Still, it remained a source of private, painful curiosity within many soldiers. "We had questions about ourselves that could be answered only in combat," said platoon leader Harold Leinbaugh, a lieutenant in Company K, 333d Infantry Regiment, 84th Division. When, in another unit, the captain announced that "Tomorrow night we attack the Siegfried Line!" platoon leader Howard Randall welcomed the news: an assault would end the uncertainty and enable the men to answer the question, "How would we stand up under really rugged action?"[14]

Randall's alacrity, like the anticipation of so many American soldiers entering battle, hinged on a critical assumption—that the consequences of combat would be determined by the effectiveness of the soldier's own reasoning and of his consequent responses. This conviction incorporated another of the beliefs Jules Masserman held fundamental to the functioning soldier—that there was a connection between his actions and what happened to him—but moved beyond it to assert the soldier's ability to control his own fate. Writing from an infantry training camp, Geddes Mumford told his parents that "[W]orrying about my getting killed . . . is foolish. I have no intention of doing anything but returning. Most men get killed in battle because they forget to take cover or make some such tactical mistake. I'll make no mistake like that." Such certainty, circulating widely in the view that soldiers were rarely hit if they did not lose their heads, propelled Mumford's efforts to attach himself to a rifle company whenever opportunity offered and ultimately to transfer from clerk-messenger to combat scout.[15]

Like Mumford, a soldier in Fort Benning's officer training program revealed the unexplored and unchallenged major premise, the assumption of individual control. Officer Candidate Bodine knew who would dominate his encounter with the enemy. "It keeps coming back just when I'm falling off to sleep . . . how it'll be to draw a bead on a living man and take his life away. I really can't wait to get over." He would act rather than be acted upon. He would place others in his sights, not find himself in others' sights. "If I just act in the right ways, from the right values," American soldiers reasoned, "all will be well." "It's good to have courage," thought poet and airman John Ciardi; "nothing happens to the brave."[16]

Soldiers also anticipated that the war they would control would be the war that they desired, one of personalized, individualized combat. They spoke as if battles would be decided by hand-to-hand fighting; their talk was of immediate, close-quarters applications of physicality. "I just know I want to get in there and kill some Japs." "[My] last hope before going to sleep was that our boys might have left a few Japs for me." A Marine aboard a troop transport bound for Guadalcanal found intolerable the laborious instruction in sector maps and unit roles: "I just want to kill a Jap, that's all." When, on Guadalcanal, a Japanese soldier ran toward the beach in flight from American tanks moving through a palm grove, Marines began firing at him. The colonel, concerned that American bullets might strike the tanks, shouted an order to cease fire, but the Marines continued to shoot. "As usual, each Marine was eager to kill *his* Jap." Even those pledges to kill ten Japs or one hundred Jerries retained that personal quality, as if those foes were to be dispatched serially. It seemed as if each American soldier, so intent on accomplishing one or another individualized battle goal, were going into combat alone.[17]

The mode of combat that best fit soldiers' expectations was the bayonet fight. No phase of basic training had left a more powerful impression than bayonet instruction. Military leaders who ordered it bore no illusion that the bayonet retained importance in a war dominated by artillery and aircraft, tanks and machine guns; but however anachronistic, its use, they thought, implanted that fierce martial spirit they wished to fix in the men. Few trainees had not been awed. Nothing seemed closer to real battle than charging, shouting—as instructed—"Kill! Kill! Kill!" and lunging at straw-sack enemies with bayoneted rifle extended. Hired to write the script for a film about GIs and touring military installations to gather "enough facts, honest-to-God true facts, to make a soldier picture which soldiers would sit through . . . without once laughing in derision," the young Arthur Miller visited an infantry replacement center and there joined trainees in crawling through an infiltration course and launching a climactic bayonet charge. "[E]verybody crouches in the trench with the bayonets set, and [the lieutenant] yells let's go! and you crunch your shoes into the dirt and clamber over the top and run faster than you ever ran before until you hit into the straw-filled potato bags set up on frames and zam, that blade goes in deep, and you're through." But Miller was surprised at his own reaction. "Funny, you felt like giving it another jab. . . . It felt good when the blade went in. It felt very good."[18]

"We always saw ourselves," Marine Grady Gallant said later, "charging through enemy . . . set up just like the bayonet course."[19]

Dedication to the bayonet remained strong as troops moved toward combat. International News Service correspondent Richard Tregaskis, sailing for Guadalcanal, reported that "all over the ship" sharpening bayonets "seemed to be a universal pastime." On Tulagi, a Marine Raider approaching his first battle "saw red when he thought of [the Japanese]. He'd take a bayonet and dance around the place, sticking it into the air and saying, 'I'm going to rip them and stick them like this!' You knew he wasn't kidding." For many, the bayonet was the weapon of a truly devoted bellicosity.[20]

For its distinctive impress the bayonet owed much to several values embedded in the culture of 1940s America. Bayonet combat was highly personal, "the most intimate fighting in the war," as army correspondent Ralph Ingersoll observed. It also promised to be a highly individualistic instrument, for it postulated one-against-one conflict replicating the pattern in which most soldiers had fought the opponents of their youth. And bayonet duels, placing decisive premium on the personal skills of the combatants, promised not only drama but fairness. Said Ingersoll, "If ever there might be a perfect balance between offense and defense, you would expect to find it in this most primitive conflict." Primitive, yes, though in soldiers' thought more elemental than savage, more quintessential than uncivilized. Indeed, it was so connected in American minds with man-to-man struggle that it opened to soldiers achievements that the culture considered among its most meritorious. Bayonet clashes, requiring the direct application of personal virtues and energies, all seemingly offered in dedication to country, embodied the highest individual heroism.[21]

Peculiarly, in the end a wartime situation far removed from the bayonet charge surpassed it in demonstrating the values which Americans brought to battle. Indeed, for reasons that will become clear, it is necessary to leave land warfare and go to another medium to find episodes in which Americans actually realized the values they pursued in the war. An instance of aerial combat described by Robert Scott in his 1943 bestseller, *God Is My Co-Pilot,* attained the acme of that personalized warfare desired by so many. A solitary Japanese Zero strafed the airfield at Hengyang, China, and was challenged by a P-40 piloted by Tex Hill.

> As the two fighters drew together in this breathtaking, head-on attack, I saw their tracers meeting and for a second I didn't know whether the ships ran together or both exploded in the air. As the smoke thinned I saw the P-40 flash on through and out into the clear, but the Jap crashed and burned on the field. . . . Hill and the Jap had shot it out nose to nose, and once again I thought of the days of Western gunplay. We landed and waited for Tex to come over. As we stood around the burning enemy ship, I saw Hill striding across the field from his fighter. Hanging low on his right leg was his army forty-five [pistol]. . . . Tex's blond hair was blowing in the wind, his eyes were looking with venomous hate at the Jap, his jaw was set. I had opened my mouth to congratulate him, for he had shot down two enemy ships that day, when . . . Tex strode over close to the fire and looked at the mutilated Jap where he had been thrown from the cockpit. Then, without a change of expression, he kicked the largest piece of Jap—the head and one shoulder—into the fire. I heard his slow drawl: 'All right, mister—if that's the way you want to fight it's all right with me.' Tex calmly left the group and walked back to his ship and into the alert shed for his cup of tea. None of us said anything.

If American fighting men had been able to create episodes embodying their expectations of combat and the bearing to which they aspired, here was the kind of encounter they would have designed.[22]

World War II, like wars before and after it, confounded the expectations of those who entered upon its battles. Few other human activities are as certain as combat to alter substantially those who participate, and American soldiers who survived more than a brief span of the fighting found themselves propelled through changes overthrowing, one after another, propositions that they had regarded as both fundamental and assured.

The organizing proposition that soldiers brought with them to battle and that at times survived at least some combat could be understood as "War is neither killing nor dying." Marine private Russell Davis approached his first battle, the amphibious attack on Peleliu, he later realized, with no serious thought of either one, as if no lives were ending on the island.[23]

The early experience of battle, however, compelled soldiers to jettison their maiden proposition, first by replacing "War is neither killing nor dying" with "War is killing." While the sense of one's own invulnerability remained intact, the killing of others seemed suddenly to render one's own survival less automatic. Grady Gallant on Guadalcanal struggled to adjust. "The thought of dying had not occurred to [the Marines]. They had not been taught to die. They had been taught to kill. Dying had not occurred to them. They did not look upon war as dying. War was killing. Seeking out the enemy and killing. . . . There was no plan to die." His worried, repetitive, dogmatic phrases were those of soldiers to whom battle sights had just brought the powerful insistence that all men were mortal. Even the most confident had to begin to wonder about their own fates. Earlier certainties had to be compromised. There was no more hooting at the idea of being wounded. Now the soldier let himself think of being shot at, though not yet of being shot at and hit. And, once exposed to battle, many soldiers sought and offered reassurances where none had been necessary before. William Owens, who was in the Pacific theater, remembered a conversation in December 1944. Although "Rarely among soldiers I knew was there talk of death, of 'getting it,'" just prior to the American return to the Philippines, one of his friends proposed that "The way for me to go in is to know I am not going to get it. The Japs ain't got a bullet with my name on it." "Hell, yes," agreed another. "You've got to go in knowing you'll come out alive. You know somebody's going to get it, but not you. You don't, you might as well stand up and let 'em shoot you down."[24]

When an American regimental commander in Italy noticed one of his young soldiers "shaking with nerves," he walked to him, placed a hand on his shoulder, and said, "Don't worry, son. Tell yourself that it won't happen to you. It is always the other fellow, you know." As soldiers began to repeat to themselves and to their comrades, "Remember, it never happens to you," a seemingly perfect assurance dwindled to incantation.[25]

With certitude disappearing, soldiers admitted and gave name to the first imponderable: They conceded a role to luck. Such terms as "odds" and "chances" and "fortune" and "Lady Luck" became the currency of their conversations. Infantryman Grady Arrington tried to cheer a fellow private who was becoming fatalistic: "Stacker, I've been with this outfit since basic training [and] have not even been scratched yet. Your chances are as good as everyone's."[26]

The third stage—"War is killing—and dying"—was the most painful to enter upon, for it insisted on the actual overthrow of that world of pre-battle assumptions. It necessitated especially the abandonment of invulnerability. "It can't happen to me" became perforce "It *can* happen to me." And it required emotional acceptance of what were to distant civilians mere truisms: that those on the other side killed too and that those whom they killed were dead. It was a mark of the intensity of resistance to the obvious that soldiers frequently testified to their surprise that someone actually desired to cause their deaths. Paratrooper Robert Houston, en route to Normandy, watched antiaircraft fire climb toward his C-47 and was surprised that "anybody actually hated us enough to want to kill us." Such was disbelief in the enemy's lethal intent that soldiers often thought that the Germans, or the Japanese, "cannot realize what they are doing to us."[27]

Grady Gallant, that Marine who on Guadalcanal was shaken by the realization that Japanese aircraft bombing American ships might at any moment turn on him ("What horror it would be . . ."), there grasped that he had previously had no understanding of death on any personal level. Yes, it had possessed a certain theoretical possibility, but it had remained remote. "My own death had never been considered by me. But now, that very real possibility flooded my mind with crystal clarity. . . . It came to me that a Japanese would no more hesitate to kill me than I would hesitate to slay him. He *would.* I could expect no mercy. There would be no negotiation. It would either be I would kill him, or he would kill me. . . . [One] of us would kill the other. . . . Death might come to me, personally."[28]

Edwin Hoyt caught the sense of surprise among American soldiers landing in Morocco against stiff Vichy French resistance in November 1942: ". . . and then for the first time in their lives they came under artillery attack. Real guns were firing at them, and trying to kill them!" Acceptance of that reality, thought Hoyt, was the first step in becoming a combat soldier.[29]

Soldiers struggled with their new vulnerability and often tried to confine it. Some envisioned that they could be wounded but refused to contemplate their own deaths. Some considered the loss of an arm or leg, but drew a line against the possibility of a head wound causing brain damage. Some granted that they might be killed but placed the event in a future that would never arrive; it would happen later, always later.[30]

Such resistance was sometimes overturned, as in Gallant's experience, by an event so dramatic that it toppled pre-combat assumptions, sometimes by "minor" incidents that any veteran would recognize as unexceptional but that could carry for initiates a traumatic power compelling them to confront the unreality of their presuppositions. For Marine Russell Davis, it was the wounded's cry of distress, so urgent with need: "Corpsman!" It reverberated in him as "the worst Greek chorus of the war," whose memory continued to frighten him years later. For others, it was the sort of convulsion experienced when a British officer in North Africa, caught in a shelling and clutching the earth at the bottom of an excavation, looked up and saw a small blade of grass gently moving in the breeze. "I watched it, fascinated!—'You're too small to be hit!' At that moment there was a thud and glow as a white-hot piece of shrapnel plunked into the wall of the trench and glared at me. I looked up. The grass was gone. Oh God!"[31]

One pattern of experience provoking rapid reconsideration was that of the non-infantry specialist, trained in the delivery of his own species of destructive power, suddenly finding himself subjected to that very power—the artilleryman shelled, the fighter pilot strafed, the bomber pilot bombed.

For ground soldiers, a common series of experiences of mounting impact—seeing for the first time enemy dead, American dead, the body of a person the soldier knew, the body of a comrade—often, in any one of its steps, forced reappraisal. It came to artilleryman Frank Mercurio with the sight of a German soldier dying on an Italian beach.

> I looked down at my feet and there lay a long stretched body clad in a green uniform; his face was white and sulky, with streaks of red blood dripping over his face and blond hair, a wounded German! The beach was crowded with maddened foot soldiers running to their advanced positions [but] I couldn't see or hear anything [but] the groans of this twisted and mangled body. His arms stretched upward, and a leg folded back under his body. I was stunned, frozen; I couldn't move; I realized that this could happen to me. My mind started to go round and round like a whirlpool of shooting stars; I realized that I too could be a victim of death. . . . Fear grew more intense now, for now I saw things about death I had only imagined.

While at first some viewed enemy dead with satisfaction—"They aren't going to kill anybody anymore"—or with indifference—"The dead . . .

looked . . . like bad stage props . . ."—many lost their composure. A Marine platoon leader, Paul Moore, Jr., newly arrived on Guadalcanal, "heard a couple of shots . . . and as we walked along the path . . . I saw this dead Japanese soldier. It was the first dead soldier that I had ever seen. That was a pretty traumatic experience. He looked to be about fifteen years old, like a nice little kid, and to see him dead there was pretty bad." But soon the first sight of a dead American intensified his distress. "I saw . . . a body in Marine Corps combat dress lying on a stretcher, and I thought he was wounded, but then I saw a fly crawling across his ear. The ear didn't move. The head didn't move. So I knew he was dead. . . . [T]hat was the first time I saw dead Marines [and it was] even more traumatic than seeing dead Japanese."[32]

Moving ashore at Oran, Lieutenant John Downing of the 1st Division's 18th Infantry "came upon a dead American soldier. he was lying on his back, a hole through his head, with hands raised toward his head. There was an expression of tension engraved on the dirty face. A staff sergeant. A dead dogface. [Downing] thought he was going to be sick. So the maneuvers were over. This was war. There would be no recall bugles in the evening. It was going to go on for a long time, and the only way out was to be carried out on a stretcher, or to lie in a ditch like this sergeant."[33]

Even more certain to jolt the soldier was the death of a comrade. Nothing brought home more rapidly the finality of death—"For the first time I truly understood that the dead . . . were dead"—and that dying could not be depended upon to overtake only other people.[34]

The artillery barrage, particularly, shook the body, the spirit—and the mind's assumptions. Ernie Pyle described an Anzio shelling: "There was debris flying back and forth all over the room. One gigantic explosion came after another. The concussion was terrific. It was like a great blast of air in which my body felt as light and as helpless as a leaf tossed in a whirlwind." Combat engineer Henry Giles also testified to the overpowering effect of the cannonade. During a bombardment by German 88s, one shell "got louder and louder until it was right on top of us and a thousand boxcars with locomotives attached couldn't have been noisier. . . . Then we heard a thud and I came as close to dying from fear as I ever will. . . ." Wounds inflicted in such barrages or elsewhere often came to constitute the decisive event. U.S. correspondent Keith Wheeler described the moment he was hit: "A violence nothing had ever taught me to believe possible smashed against the right side of my face." And when a mortar fragment tore into cartoonist Bill Mauldin's foot, he too was shocked: "It can't happen to you. But . . . suddenly the war became very real to me."[35]

While a few soldiers could continue to slough off for a time injuries witnessed and even suffered, most completed quickly the transition to the realities of combat. Battle bore little relationship to civilian life and its presumptions. What the soldier first saw in battle, William Shirer noted, made little sense to him because "It did not fit into anything." Or, as paratroop commander Laurence Critchell put it, "Combat is foreign to all other experience; nothing in ordinary life reminds one of it." But once pushed to the other side, they began transforming themselves—swiftly. An English captain judged that in most cases he witnessed nothing beyond the first exposure to battle was required: the "baptism of fire" was sufficient to instill the "undefinable something" that differentiated the veteran from the newcomer, "almost as though a knowledge of war were some secret rite." American participants agreed that the transition was a rapid one. After a single night on Tulagi, Raider Sabatelli noticed that "All the boys seemed a little quieter, even a little older. You knew right there what war was like." Initiated into battle in Germany's Huertgen Forest, Lieutenant Paul Boesch said to himself, "So this is combat. I've had only one day of it. How does a man stand it, day in and day out?" One of James Jones's soldiers in the Pacific, conscious of the fear and helplessness that had arrived with a mortar sliver in the hand, decided that no one required more than two days of combat.[36]

Marine pilot Samuel Hynes summarized how change swept over so many fighting men. "The reality of death comes to you in stages. First it is an idea—all men are mortal, as in the syllogism. Then it is something that happens to strangers, then to persons you know, but somewhere else, and at last it enters your presence, and you see death. . . ."[37]

Whatever their variety and tempo, the events that confronted these men with death's reality also brought home to them another harsh truth: their loss of control over events. Battle introduced them to the immensity of the force that would be brought against them, infused them with feelings of diminution and even helplessness, and ultimately denied them their sense of order and purposiveness.

Efforts to describe the force to which the battlefield subjected soldiers pushed them to the limits of their imaginations. The might of the artillery barrage was a special challenge. "To me," wrote Marine Eugene Sledge, "artillery was an invention of hell. The onrushing whistle and scream of the big steel package of destruction was the pinnacle of violent fury and the embodiment of pent-up evil. It was the essence of violence and of man's inhumanity to man." "It was," proposed Private Lester Atwell, "as if an enraged giant were hurling with all his force an entire string of trains, screaming locomotive and all." Infantryman Walter Bernstein thought that "something about heavy artillery . . . is inhuman and terribly frightening. . . . It is like the finger of God."[38]

Now, soldiers knew they were facing forces beyond their control. "When I heard the whistle of an approaching [shell]," Sledge reported, "every muscle in my body contracted. I braced myself in a puny effort to keep from being swept away. I felt utterly helpless." "We were reduced to the size of ants," Atwell submitted. "I felt cowardly and small," said Bernstein; "I felt like a fly about to be swatted."[39]

Often GIs caught in shellings could no longer command their muscles and were wracked sometimes by spasms, sometimes by paralysis. Geddes Mumford told his father that he had watched "men cry like babies after they have been under [artillery fire] too long. I've seen men almost unable to walk just from nervous exhaustion." But the physical toll was frequently less menacing than the prospect of psychological disintegration. Eugene Sledge feared that "if I ever lost control of myself under shell fire my mind would be shattered. I hated shells as much for their damage to the mind as to the body." Others were visited by what Sledge dreaded. Ernie Pyle reported that in the wake of prolonged artillery barrages, he saw "many pitiful cases of 'anxiety neurosis.'" Nightmares of being shelled were numbered among the battle dreams that most haunted those in Army hospitals. "It's the whine and crunch of shells and [their mutilation of the] bodies of your buddies," Mumford knew, that ". . . tears a man to pieces."[40]

Bombing attacks, too, brought sensations of overwhelming force and threats of demoralization and even nervous collapse, but the sense of powerlessness was not often as profound as in the artillery barrage. Doubtless the aerial assault was painful. As a British lieutenant reported from the North African desert: "It is demoralizing for an infantryman to be attacked by something he can see . . . but which is too fast or too high to form a target." A Marine captain in the Pacific wished that he could relieve the strain of Japanese air attacks by firing his pistol or even by throwing rocks at his tormentors. Still, the soldier could see aircraft; strafing runs sometimes brought them within range of the infantry's machine guns; and even rifle fire might on rare occasions bring down a plane.[41]

The artillery barrage seemed far more malign. No weapon, no missile, no human agent was visible to its targets, and thus there could be none of the psychological relief to be derived from infantry retaliation. Correspondent-photographer Margaret Bourke-White had survived bombing attacks on Barcelona, Chunking, and London and "had not minded [it] too much," but she found cannonades different. "Shelling was like a dentist with a drill. And with me, those shells had found the nerve"—largely because she felt so helpless. "In many forms of anger you can do something about it, and that is your salvation. . . . But with shelling, you simply can't do anything. . . . You are pinned to your ditch . . . like a fox in a trap. You are at the will of the enemy."[42]

Soldiers at first responded with small gestures of defiance. "Occasionally, as an act of bravado and to signal an insult to their enemies, a GI would clamber out of his foxhole as shells burst nearby. 'Here we were, pinned down by shellfire and you see some guy going out in the middle of a field to take a crap. It broke the tension and brought a laugh to most everyone.'" Others found some alleviation in simply shouting out their fury. But gestures were seldom repeated—they cost lives—and on whom was the soldier's anger to be trained? Enemy artillerymen miles away? It expended precious energy simply to shape protest in the imagination, and no result would diminish the shelling's impact or lift for more than a moment the shelled soldier's sense of impotence. As Captain Laurence Critchell discovered, the infantryman "must listen in silence, generally without moving, while the heavy shells explode with a shattering thunder . . . all-encompassing in [their] violence. . . . With each roar the earth shakes. . . . What is worse, each explosion is anticipated by a high, thin and unearthly shriek—unearthly because it comes from something moving faster than instinct comprehends. . . . [T]here is nothing a man can do to help himself."[43]

Almost as debilitating was the American soldier's experience with German mines. Preconceptions of combat came close to assuming that if the soldier could see no enemies, they could not injure him; but mines, like long-range artillery, demonstrated that his destruction did not require the enemy's presence. "They were planted a few inches below the soil," explained platoon leader George Wilson, "and covered by leaves or natural growth that left no sign. Not a bit of ground was safe. They went off if you stepped on them with as little as five pounds of pressure, or if you moved their invisibly thin trip wire. The only defense was not to move at all. A mine usually blew off one leg up to the knee and shattered the other, which looked like it had been blasted by a shotgun at close range. If a man was not killed instantly, he needed immediate attention due to shock and loss of blood."[44]

Mines were more trying than bullets. "The German machine guns and rifles were different," decided infantry officer William Dreux; "at least I thought I could cope with them and I had a chance. Behind each such weapon was an enemy and I might get him before he could get me." It was the antipersonnel mine that he "dreaded most." And in some ways mines were worse than shells. That "high, thin unearthly shriek" that agitated Critchell had at least warned him that a shell was on its way. As the war moved forward, the Germans developed mines whose only metal was in the detonator and then glass and plastic mines that were undetectable by early-war metal detectors, so often the first and only sign of their presence was the explosion that killed or maimed. The psychological impact on those who could do no more than "Be careful!" in searching for (often non-existent) telltale signs was enormous. Sometimes even to escape produced severe demoralization. One can only try to imagine what a group of 84th Division infantrymen felt when they realized that they had just walked across a field sown with German stake mines, but though some of them had actually stumbled against canisters, they had been spared even a single explosion because American artillery shells had miraculously cut every one of the tripwires.[45]

Lieutenant George Wilson summarized a characteristic American reaction to mines: "It was there in that green forest [overlooking the Siegfried Line near Miescheid] that we ran into the most frightening weapon of the war, the one that made us almost sick with fear: *antipersonnel mines.* By now I had gone through aerial bombing, artillery and mortar shelling, open combat, direct rifle and machine-gun firing, night patrolling, and ambush. Against all of this we had some kind of chance; against mines we had none. They were viciously, deadly, inhuman. They churned our guts. . . . Soon each of the line companies had lost men to mines, and the rest of us were afraid to walk anywhere."[46]

In the eleven months between the Normandy invasion and the German capitulation, save for several brief periods of rapid breakout advances, American soldiers in lead units were seldom able to evade the lethal circles of German mines.

The average combat soldier thus lost his sense of invulnerability—and discovered how accessible he was to death. He lost too his sense of control over battle—and discovered his helplessness in the face of shellings and minefields. And these revelations abraded other, related propositions that soldiers had confidently brought with them into combat.

One of the first to disappear was the determination to close with the enemy. Encountering in battle more exhaustion than vitalization, more physical discomfort than excitement, more confusion than clarity, more fear than gratification, soldiers who failed to find what they had expected realized that they had not been trained for what they did find. Some began to think of battle as an experience so extraordinary that it allowed of no preparation, but most were angry, muddled, and defeated. The "ruling passion" of Canadian soldier Farley Mowat—his intense desire for combat—"collapsed like a pricked balloon." "What [am] I doing here?" infantry private Lester Atwell asked himself. "Panic came over me and for a wild moment I thought of marching into the new Company Commander's tent and saying, 'Look. There's been some big mistake. I'm here, but I haven't had the same training as the others and I have no idea what to do in combat. What do you intend to do about it?' "[47]

A frequent early reaction, drawing on that new, frightening sense of personal jeopardy, was to dismiss bravery and to summon what a British tank officer, Robert Crisp, called "judicious discrimination"—shorn of euphemism, the resolve to be ever careful, ever cautious. Dashing to close with the enemy now seemed the way to certain death.[48]

Occasionally, a soldier was so imbued with martial spirit and so fortunate in his first experience of combat that he was able to defer reconsideration or even to reaffirm pre-combat propositions. Morton Eustis, one of those soldiers so eager to get into action, found a job—in an armored division's reconnaissance battalion—that enabled him to do so. His first combat, in Sicily, was largely reassuring: "I got through the campaign without a scratch, save for those on my hands from crawling through bushes, scouting. . . . I enjoyed the campaign immensely. It's a fascinating game, particularly when you're the first element out front. And the fact that the stakes are high makes it all the more engrossing." He flirted briefly with fatalism ("If you're going to be hit, you're going to be hit and there's not much you can do about it"), but he was able to confine his fear ("You really haven't time to think about being scared for the most part"), and by the date his division was sent to England to prepare for the campaign in Western Europe, his assumptions seemed once more as they had been prior to battle. He was impatient for "more action."[49]

In France, Eustis was at first exhilarated by his rides in tanks and by the accompanying sensation "that nothing can stop you." He soon decided, however, that "This campaign is a good deal nearer the real thing than Sicily was," a conclusion swiftly underscored by two telling experiences. After "many, many close shaves" ("At times you get a little bit fed up with being under fire, usually when you are just sitting under artillery fire and can't fire back"), he ran "smack into the enemy lines" and survived only because the Germans were too startled to fire. Shortly thereafter he escaped an enemy ambush. ("For a few moments I thought we'd never get out.") His thought turned decisively.

> I shouldn't mind . . . if the whole [war] wound up before many more weeks are passed, as your luck can hold out just so long in this type of game, and sooner

> or later someone's aim is going to be good, especially when you are sitting out most of the time in the point vehicle.

Three days later, riding exposed in the turret of a lead reconnaissance tank, he was killed instantly by a German *Panzerfaust.*[50]

Most soldiers, however, moved much faster and, when reconsidering their pre-combat convictions, seldom returned to them. With studied nonchalance, Geddes Mumford told his parents, "Your dear little boy has finally seen the more gruesome side of this man's war. I celebrated my [nineteenth] birthday by coming as close to getting killed as I ever want to. I felt the machine gun bullets passing my shoulder. Two of my buddies were hit by the same burst. It's a great life if you like excitement." Some repudiated explicitly their earlier expectations. Captain George Hunt declared that although those in his Marine unit "might have been stirred once by a parade, a cheering crowd and a brass band, they knew now that fighting was a dirty business in which the glamour that might have existed once in [their] imagination was lost." Once he had been in battle on Guadalcanal, rifleman John George reported derisively, the memory of his impatience to enter the fighting "provided me with numerous laughs, especially on many occasions when I was able to think back on it from a hot spot in the middle of a raging fire fight."[51]

Sadly, more authentic perceptions of combat could neither comfort the soldier nor mitigate the problem confronting him. The loss of desire to close with the adversary in no way altered the reality that, from summer 1942 to the end of the war, forcing battle on the enemy was the primary mission of the American military forces. Engagement, no longer the soldier's desire, remained his job—through one captured town after another; through one island invasion to the next; through countless enemy dead replaceable in ways that seemed always to present him with a solid front of opposition.[52]

Another casualty of battlefield experience was the soldier's fascination with personalized combat. Weapons technology dictated that soldiers would not often see the enemy; combatants were able to destroy their opponents without bringing them within sight. That the range and lethality of their weapons separated antagonists and eliminated mass movements surprised many soldiers. Atwell was stunned: "This wasn't anything as I had imagined actual combat, this lonely little string of men. When I thought of it at all, I saw a battlefield and rows of men advancing shoulder to shoulder, cannons firing, the first ranks being mowed down. I realized I had been thinking of [Civil War soldiers in] scenes from *The Birth of a Nation.*" No less taken aback was correspondent Eric Sevareid. "Never were there masses of men in olive drab locked in photogenic combat with masses of men in field gray."

> What one observed, in apparently unrelated patches, [were] small, loose bodies of men moving down narrow defiles or over steep inclines, going methodically from position to position between long halts, and the only continuous factor was the roaring and crackling of the big guns. One felt baffled at first by the unreality of it all. Unseen groups of men were fighting other men that they rarely saw. They located the enemy by the abstractions of mathematics, an imagined science; they reported the enemy through radio waves that no man could visualize; and they destroyed him most frequently with projectiles no eye could follow. When the target became quiet, that particular fight would be over and they moved ahead to something else. . . . It was a slow, spasmodic movement from one patch of silence to another.

Battle was becoming, as Lee Kennett has observed, an environment in which no enemy and few friends were discernible.[53]

Soldiers found perturbing the invisibility of the enemy. A Canadian was both wistful—"If I could only see [the Germans], as in battles long ago, at close range, before engaging them"—and aggrieved—"The warring sides are getting farther and farther apart and [thus] war is getting more and more meaningless for field-warriors. . . . It is already a very impersonal thing." Groused Audie Murphy, an infantryman whose actions won him a record twenty-eight decorations, "Maybe my notions about war were all cockeyed. How do you pit skill against skill if you cannot even see the enemy?" Ralph Ingersoll, climbing a Tunisian hill to his first battle, registered in his mind "the sounds of the firing and that feeling of excitement and wanting to get quickly to where I could see what was happening." But the reality was eerie: "The scene in the valley looked even more peaceful than the scene on the hilltop." Though around him German rifle bullets zinged off rocks and automatic weapons barked, "I couldn't see any enemy at all."[54]

Near the German town of Kogenbroich, someone in Lieutenant Harold Leinbaugh's company shot a German trying to move from a log dugout to a concrete pillbox. Private Joe Namey was "pretty sure" that Paul Coste had killed the enemy soldier. But if so, Coste remained unwitting: "I finally got to fire my [Browning Automatic Rifle], but I never had a target. I laid down fire when someone told me to, but I literally never aimed at anyone." Later, enemy fire pinned down another member of the company, Mel Cline. "This German machine gunner was directly to our front. . . . We could see [him] come up from his hole, fire, and duck down again. I adjusted my sights, got the range, and squeezed off several clips before I finally hit his gun and put him out of action. When we reached his hole, I found [that] the bullet had glanced off his machine gun and mangled his arm." "That was," Cline later recalled, "the only time in combat that I fired aimed shots like we did on the range in training."[55]

In the Pacific, even more than in the European theater, the low visibility of the enemy became what Tregaskis called "a perfectly normal condition." The density of the foliage, the rarity of prisoner-taking, and the Japanese resort to underground fortifications kept sightings uncommon. Eugene Sledge described the Marines' struggle to seize Hill 140 on the island of Peleliu: "If we moved past a certain point, the Japanese opened up suddenly with rifle, machine gun, mortar, and artillery fire. It was like a sudden storm breaking. More often than not we had to pull back, and not a man in the company had seen a live enemy anywhere."[56]

These dramatic alterations in the men's conceptions of war, and their new, intense desire to remain outside the sweep of the enemy's weapons, precluded any renewal of interest in the bayonet charge as the acme of the combat experience. During the Battle of the Bulge, the German American paratrooper Kurt Gabel was astonished to hear the command, "Fix bayonets!"

> I felt the shock of it jerk my body. Surely this was some kind of psychological game they played in Company F! Fix bayonets? That's World War I stuff. Bayonets were for opening C-ration cans. Sometimes you threw them at trees while imitating Errol Flynn or John Wayne, and of course in basic training you had to pretend how fierce you were as you thrust them into sandbag dummies. But here? I searched for the lieutenant, expecting to see a big grin on his face as he enjoyed this stupid joke..

When Lieutenant George Wilson's regimental commander wished to learn the type and strength of an opposing unit near Saint-Lô in Normandy, he ordered Wilson to organize a combat patrol whose mission was "to engage the Germans in a fight—using trench knives, bayonets, and grenades. We were to inflict as much damage as possible, then quickly take a prisoner and get out." Wilson was appalled. Was the colonel aware "that it would be difficult to find more than two bayonets in the whole company and very few more trench knives"? Angrily, the colonel demanded explanations, insisted on inspections by company commanders, and ordered that the mission proceed. The "asinine patrol" came to nothing. Wilson had been aware from the outset that "hand-to-hand combat was about the last thing [the men] wanted to do."[57]

John Toole of the 3d Infantry Division later remembered that "Small arms fire . . . terrified me. It meant that the Germans were firing directly at me or my buddies and that they would soon close in for hand-to-hand combat. [Here he paused to reconsider.] Actually, we practically never engaged in hand-to-hand combat.* . . . The automatic and semi-automatic weapons eliminated the bayonet as it was used in World War I."[58]

Vernon McHugh, an NCO in General Patton's Third Army, remembered that his company commander had urged the riflemen to throw away their bayonets—on grounds that if a soldier were close enough to stick an enemy, he was close enough to shoot him. McHugh could have told the homefolks that while bayonet duels remained one of the most prominent features of World War II films, they had largely disappeared from World War II combat.[59]

Ironically, in light of higher officers' insistence that combat soldiers hold fast to the bayonet, the semiofficial American handbook on *How the Jap Army Fights,* published early in the war, found incomprehensible the place accorded it in the Imperial Japanese Army as the "most essential weapon" carried by the Japanese soldier.[60]

Even the prominence of the Cause suffered in battle. Consideration of principles and larger aims diminished drastically as soldiers realized that they had no bearing on battle. Convinced that they made war in a good cause, GIs did not miss that the Germans and the Japanese often fought very well in behalf of what Americans were certain was a bad cause. It was not surprising that amid this deflation a few soldiers found grounds to repudiate their commitment to the Cause. Artilleryman Frank Mercurio, caught on that invasion beach and reasoning with a mind going "round and round like a whirlpool of shooting stars," realized that if he were killed, he would be unable to benefit from the precepts for which he was risking his life. "So why fight for them, if I can't live to go home and enjoy them? I didn't want any part of it." Overwhelming numbers of soldiers, however, remained convinced of a cause that to them possessed rock-solid justification. No less persuasive, it simply became, in both European and Pacific combat, extraneous to absorbing daily pursuits and consequently virtually disappeared from their thoughts.[61]

Another canon—the assumption of American material superiority—also suffered, though here the issue was factualness rather than pertinence. Seldom were there grounds to question the quality of resources made available to the U.S. Navy—beyond the flawed torpedoes that did constitute a serious problem in the war's early stages. American aircraft yielded some elements of superiority to the Japanese Zero, but only at the outset, and to the German ME-262 jet aircraft, but only in the last days of the war; otherwise, American planes, in their quality and especially in their numbers, dominated those of their opponents.

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*Tools

American sailors and airmen, then, lacked cause to complain about the weapons given them to fight the war. Combat soldiers, however, had grounds for grievance. American technological accomplishment was weakest where it affected them most. True, their semi-automatic M-1 rifle was a better basic weapon than the landser's bolt-action Mauser; the military historian Russell Weigley had described the M-1 as the best standard shoulder arm of the war. German machine guns and antitank missiles, however, were conspicuously superior to their American counterparts, and Weigley, for one, maintains that the Wehrmacht squad consequently possessed a firepower greater than that of the U.S. Army squad. Of those forces working in support of the infantry the Americans possessed more artillery, but the German 88 was, by common consent, the most effective artillery piece of the war. Tanks posed a special problem. In 1944, Nazi production chief Albert Speer boasted that "one Tiger II [tank] has . . . the same effect as 25 to 30 Shermans." Americans disputed the numbers—an American tank commander told combat engineer Henry Giles that "it took four of our Shermans to equal one of their Panthers and about eight to equal one of their Tigers"—but combat soldiers conceded, often with bitterness, the fundamental truth beneath Speer's claim: German tank supremacy.[62]

Field surgeon Brendan Phibbs watched as an American tank caught a Panther in its sights and fired three 76-mm rounds that struck the enemy vehicle "swiftly and accurately, right on the front slope-plate"—and bounced away. As a tanker screamed over the radio net, "Ping-Pong balls! Goddamn fucking Ping-Pong balls!" a shell from the Panther traversed the length of the American tank, destroying it and at least one of its crew. Phibbs, who learned to approach burned American tanks from upwind because of the odor of charred flesh, could hardly restrain his anger.

Even German prisoners of war sympathized with the victims of so unmistakable a technological disparity.

> Ronsons, you know. Ronsons, yes, like for a cigarette. Our [German] gunners see your tanks coming . . . and they say to each other, "Here comes another Ronson." Why do the Americans do this for us? Bang! and it burns like twenty haystacks. All the people [inside], my God.
>
> Those funny tanks with the little guns, and so high and straight we can see

> them from a long way in our gunsights. Those square sides, and thin, the armor. We know if we hit one it goes up.
>
> Why does the country of Detroit send their men out to die in these things?[63]

Fortunately for the Allies, the Wehrmacht lacked the numbers of tanks that might have proven decisive, and the superiority of German manufacture was in the end overcome by the plenitude of Shermans and, more decisively, of artillery support.

Still, American soldiers in Europe were often confronted, as GIs and Marines in the Pacific almost never were, with recurring instances of a local enemy weapons superiority. Coupled with soldiers' diminishing sense of control within their own sphere, the consequences were disheartening. Infantry medic Frank Irgang contemplated the SS troops blocking his unit's advance: "Yes, we were well fed and equipped, but they had a match for everything we had, and it usually went one better." Giles decided that "One thing you have to give the Krauts. Some of their equipment is damned good and a lot of it beats the hell out of ours." His conclusion was bleak: "If they hadn't been fighting for five years before we got here and hadn't had a two-front war on their hands at that, we'd have had a hell of a time licking them. They've been hard enough, the way it is."[64]

Failing to find in combat much that they had expected, finding much that they had not expected, and quickly losing the exuberant, confident aggressiveness with which most had approached battle, soldiers began manifesting the strain of their lives in combat. The most visible sign was physical aging.

Young soldiers had looked forward to war altering them physically and emotionally. En route to maturation, no station would be more significant, and battle would be the decisive rite of passage, entered upon as a boy, releasing one as a man. It seemed reasonable, too, that physical exertion, exposure to the elements, and irregular sleep would exact some physical costs. But the reality revealed a process moving much faster and further than soldiers had foreseen, and they struggled in their description of the results. One of them spoke of taking on "the look and movements of middle age." Some agreed that they were losing youthfulness but thought the result an indeterminate ageless appearance. Others simply concluded that they were growing old too soon. But all would have identified with George Hunt's observation of his Marine comrades: "Every face seemed older than it should have been, more hard-bitten."[65]

Equally confusing was the rapidity of the metamorphosis. Grady Arrington thought that a friend had "aged immeasurably" in his first three hours of combat. A cook in Harold Leinbaugh's company noticed that soldiers returning for hot food after their first battle "hardly looked like the same men." A sailor described those who debarked for, and later re-embarked from, Pacific island battles: "Going, they are young and in the best of health. Returning, they are old and beaten shells that once were men." Replacements gingerly surveyed old-timers and wondered, "Are we going to look like that?" Veterans saw that question in the glances of new men; with certain knowledge—"Their youth will decay; they'll become tired and aged"—but with a certain pity for an innocence they knew would be lost, they seldom tendered the answer: "Yes, very soon."[66]

Grady Arrington barely recognized a college companion who had recently seen combat; but by his friend's reaction when he hailed him, Arrington realized that he would have to introduce himself: his friend had entirely failed to recognize him.[67]

The availability of mirrors in airbase barracks and the opportunity—indeed, requirement—for daily grooming often brought home battle-aging to airmen faster than to ground troops. Bomber pilot Bert Stiles said of himself and of those air-crews around him at a base in England that in the mirror they were all "like old men."[68]

Volubility disappeared as rapidly as youthfulness. Based on his observations of Americans at Normandy, Richard Tobin, correspondent for the *New York Herald Tribune,* concluded that Londoners would no longer find familiar those Yanks so recently in their midst. In fact, Tobin himself "scarcely recognized the G.I. whom I had met in such loquacious quantities aboard my troop transport. . . ." "The first thing that has happened to him is that he has stopped talking." He "did not often look up or say anything at all. . . ." In the wake of its first experience of battle in Luxembourg—of 180 men, 16 had been killed and 30 wounded—Howard Randall's Company K became "a solemn and greatly changed group of men." Gone were their earlier horseplay and loud talk. And seldom did soldiers, even with the lifting of somber post-battle moods, recover their talkativeness.[69]

The experience of the 16th Infantry Regiment made plain that such changes were neither superficial nor transient. Brought to England to prepare for the Normandy invasion, its men were ordered, for purposes of security, to conceal their participation in combat in North Africa and Sicily and their affiliation with the 1st Division; so, "Unit patches were ripped off uniforms, combat decorations and theater ribbons were forbidden, and the big red '1' on their helmets was painted over with brown paint. They were to [tell others] that they had [just] come fresh from the United States." The men of the 16th complied. (Obedience was never more onerous than when earlier arrivals, who though without battle experience considered themselves "old hands," shouted at the columns of the 16th, "Hey, what took you guys so long in getting over here?" and "Waiting for the war to end [so you can] cash in on the glory?" and "Were you afraid to leave your mommas?" and "Careful now, girls, don't stub your toes.") But not even stiff will and model discipline could carry the ruse. The 16th Regiment had lost its ebullience to battle. There was no bonhomie, no persiflage, no boasting of what the men would do in combat. And civilians, grasping the similarity between the 16th and young English veterans of their acquaintance, knew immediately that these were Americans who had been in battle. They were "too quiet."[70]

Those who had seen combat talked to new arrivals in their own ranks diffidently and differently. Many campaigners clung to silence on the grounds that replacements would "find out soon enough for themselves." Many replacements resented the veterans' reserve and, no less, some of what *was* said. In the light of subsequent experience, it sometimes seemed that the old-timers had given them false information. From North Africa Morton Eustis wrote home that "Everyone here who has been [at the front] says that you're scared absolutely sick the first time that you're dive-bombed or shelled, but that gradually you get accustomed to it, particularly as you realize how rarely you get hit, especially if you don't lose your head." No veteran believed in the diminution of fear or the ability of rationality to fend off casualties, but false assurances were not always offered from cruelty or trickery, except when beginners were intolerably brash. Often the governing intent, behind the gruffness, was sympathetic consideration. Why alarm them? Learning for themselves would be hard enough. True, replacements justifiably curious and genuinely concerned to learn of battle did, in their ardor, still send out signals that they knew it all. And in response, many veterans—in pained combinations irritated, offended, sympathetic, and despairing of their ability to communicate to others the realities of battle—were most likely to shelter beneath a laconic "Just wait and see."[71]

Reticence, in fact, rose to a level meriting at least semi-official attention. Colonel Samuel Lyman Marshall, a journalist and military commentator who at war's end became the Army's chief historian of European theater operations, complained that while German and Japanese soldiers talked to one another in battle, thereby joining force and multiplying strength, American soldiers remained silent, threatening small units with a loss of control due to the failure of "close-up communications." He blamed "a definite blind spot in our training"—the inability to impart awareness that it was "when you talk to others and they join with you that your action becomes important." The United States, he lamented, had committed to battle against the Axis "about the mutest [army] we ever sent to war." True, at or near the front it was not a talking, shouting, or singing army, but no one had ever testified to the reluctance of American soldiers, prior to combat, to express themselves in mess hall, on bayonet range, or in any other military or social setting. Their reserve was another acquisition of combat.[72]

The loss of volubility was a further component of the soldier's sinking sense of control and thus of a heightening awareness of his own fragility. An acute manifestation appeared among a group of 9th Infantry Division riflemen during furious fighting in the Huertgen Forest. Convinced that death was imminent, they debated whether it would remain at bay long enough for them to finish smoking the carton of cigarettes they carried with them. Or a pack? Or the single cigarette just lighted? Confidence in survival had given way to deep pessimism, and it was here that soldiers seeking ways to contend with the change yielded the ruling role in their calculations to luck. Wrote Morton Eustis to his mother: "It's luck, pure and simple, this game. There's no other way you can look at it." Only chance could explain life-and-death episodes in which no soldier's action, wise or stupid, could account for the outcome—and battle abounded in such occurrences.[73]

As the vehicle carrying Franklyn Johnson, a member of an anti-tank unit, drove through a dirty Tunisian creek, he glanced behind just as the water cleared to reveal, midway between the tire tracks, a German teller mine. Ten minutes later, farther along the road, another truck struck an identical mine, killing two Americans. In Luxembourg, platoon leader Howard Randall realized that he had inadvertently pulled the trip wire of a German booby trap—"I tried to think of a prayer—[and] couldn't"—but with a sudden drop in temperature, a small bead of ice had so formed that it kept the firing device, a cotter pin, slightly spread. There was no explosion. Why did an enemy shell snuff out the lives of one group of Americans and another, landing in the midst of a similar group, fail to detonate? Why, at that moment, was a particular soldier in the second group rather than the first? "You were where you were and the men who were being killed were where they were," one of writer Harry Brown's soldiers tried, and failed, to explain. Private Lester Atwell pondered artillery deaths on his second day of fighting: "Some men had been killed [by German 88-mm shells] because they were in foxholes; some because they were not. Still others had been hit by our own artillery falling short of its mark." "It seemed dehumanized to me, a matter of purest chance." Battle drew almost all American soldiers into agreement with James Jones's observation that "We pretty much lived by superstition. We had to. When all of knowledge and of . . . experience had been utilized, the outcome of . . . a defense or an attack depended largely on luck."[74]

The first adjustment to luck's new prominence, a reorientation from "I'm in control and won't get hit because I won't make a mistake" to "I may not be in control, but I still won't get hit because I'm a lucky bastard," was no less painful than the surrender of any other cherished certainty and, moreover, had to be accomplished rapidly. In combat's early stages, soldiers remained unwilling to grant luck unfettered play in their lives—no one, after all, believed that all luck was good luck—so they resorted to the notion of odds, used both as a hedge and as a charm against any unfavorable turn of luck. And while still new to battle, they tended to very optimistic estimates of the odds. Wrote Eustis: "[W]e knew . . . that your chances of getting hit, even under direct machine gun fire, were slight." "It's always a help to be under fire and to realize how great the odds are against being hit." As casualties mounted, however, calculations became less confident. American combat doctor Klaus Huebner counted the replacements who arrived to replenish his battalion: "Approximately two hundred and fifty new faces appear. I now realize that we have already lost and replaced one half of the battalion since starting our push up the Italian peninsula [forty-nine days ago]. Thus far, my chances of [remaining] alive have been about fifty-fifty." Soon combat lieutenants were computing the life spans of platoon leaders following arrival in their theater of operations. (In Western Europe, the average was thirty days.) The soldier's god, professed James Jones, was "a Great Roulette Wheel."[75]

Next came a fear that the odds protecting one were daily growing less favorable and that one's own luck was running out. It was one thing to say of unit members just killed, "Well, luck can last only so long"; it was quite another for the soldier to stand and face a new conviction that *his own* luck was being expended. Sometimes triggered by the death of a soldier who was a favorite in the company or whose friends thought him indestructible ("Until today, I thought maybe there was a chance of getting through alive. But when Horse-Face got it, I gave up"), the moment of confrontation could be shattering. Eugene Sledge, approaching Kunishi Ridge on southern Okinawa, "plodded along through the darkness, my heart pounding, my throat dry and almost too tight to swallow[;] near-panic seized me. Having made it that far in the war, I *knew* my luck would run out. I began to sweat and pray. . . . I wanted to turn and run away." No one caught this critical juncture more perceptively than Robert Crisp, the British tank officer who fought in the North African desert campaign:

> I had had half a dozen tanks knocked out under me, I had seen tanks alongside me turned into incandescent tombs for the men trapped inside them, I had been sprayed with lead particles and God knows how many times I had escaped death by the smallest fraction of deviation in some gunner's aim; I had passed more or less unscathed through air filled with the flying steel of shell explosions and the indiscriminate hail of machine-gun fire. I tried to console myself by thinking that each battle presented exactly the same chances of individual survival or obliteration. But I felt my chances were running out; that I had used them all up. . . . [Our] next objective was the rear of the enemy position at Gazala, and I had a frightening certainty that I was going to be particularly involved in a way that would not affect anybody else. I had been afraid often enough before, but it had always been tempered by the conviction that, whatever happened to anybody else, disaster could not come to me. "It could not happen to me." It was, in fact, the basis of most of my actions. Now, in a moment of realisation that made me very afraid, I knew I had lost my immunity.[76]

Ironically, as the soldier came to feel his complete loss of control and thus his complete vulnerability, success—i.e., staying alive—veered to reinforce pessimism rather than confidence in survival. Another British officer, after suffering in fighting within Germany "several more narrow shaves," remembered that six months earlier he had found close-by shell explosions "slightly exhilarating, just as when one has ridden in a number of steeplechases without a mishap, it does one's nerve good to have a harmless fall." No longer. "[Now] I have seen too much. . . ." Last autumn dodging mortar shells had seemed an amusement. No longer. "But [now] it wasn't fun at all." Each escape from death seemed less assured, more miraculous, and thus increasingly unlikely to repeat itself, so he and his men were going into battle "knowing perfectly well that [we] are dicing against the mathematical odds. . . . For an officer to go into a dozen actions without being killed or badly wounded is like a coin coming down heads six times running. He knows that his luck cannot possibly last. . . ."[77]

It was here roughly, as soldiers were compelled to concede the loss of all protection, that their thought, increasingly fatalistic, narrowed down to two final formulations: the conviction that "War is dying," and an almost full acceptance of "It is going to happen to me."

Infantrymen felt more acutely than others in the war zone this new and unconquerable conviction of their own expendability, for time in battle also brought convincing evidence that they stood almost alone, that the supporting arms could not be relied upon, and that many on their own side were willing to see them killed.

Infantrymen found out that tanks were a motley benefit, even when working in direct support of foot soldiers. Soldiers could not live with them or without them, decided Frank Irgang and his comrades. Tanks' firepower was of course welcome and their battering power could sometimes demolish enemy-held buildings or hedgerows, but they regularly attracted enemy artillery fire. In Italy, a soldier of the 10th Mountain Division, John Bassett, expressed a common infantry reaction: "Halfway up the hill the line stopped and we stooped down beside a protective . . . hedge. There were tanks going by . . . and then they stopped. Those bastards, I muttered. They'll draw more artillery fire on us." In France, Vernon McHugh decided that despite their "wonderful support," he "wanted no part of tanks. They are moving foxholes easy for the Jerries to spot."[78]

Foot soldiers in Europe were well aware that the American tank was inferior to the German and was especially vulnerable to its 88. "[In] a tank-against-tank battle we were decidedly mercenary and bet on the Jerries, unless our tanks outnumbered them something fierce. A Tiger could sit all day just like a chunk of solid steel, soaking up the punishment, and then blast off one 88 and put 'paid' to the pestering Sherman. . . ." But because tankers still seemed so much better protected than they, infantry often derided the cautiousness of the armor. Even worse was what appeared the behemoths' lumbering obliviousness. Just as SS troops in the French village of Saint-Benôit began to wave white flags at dug-in GIs, two Shermans "clanked into the field . . . took no time to ask questions [and] opened up on the village with their .50-caliber turret guns and their 75-millimeter cannon. White flags and Germans [seeking new cover] disappeared in a cloud of dust." Often tanks supposed to shield infantry required shielding *by* the infantry. "'Tank-chasing' [use of foot men to protect tanks]," reported a Marine on Okinawa, "became one of the most dreaded chores of the riflemen."[79]

Infantrymen frequently protested that the tankmen deserted them and, specifically, that they were too quick to withdraw when they drew enemy fire. A Bill Mauldin cartoon pictured a tanker popping genially from his hatch to tell five nearby GIs crouching in their holes, "We'll go away an' stop botherin' you boys now. Jerry's got our range." Infantry also grumbled that the tankers' insistence on nightly behind-the-lines "maintenance" of their machines owed less to mechanical necessity than to the desire for sound sleep. Accordingly, ground soldiers sometimes resorted to manipulation to overcome what they deemed tanker timidity. As part of an effort to persuade armor to move up, Don Lavender of the 9th Infantry Division understated to the tankers the size of the German tanks opposing them.[80]

In truth, however, at its heart the infantryman's estrangement drew less on complaints of inadequate support—by any comparative measure American infantry-armor cooperation was very good—and more on the grievance caught by Mauldin: Foot soldiers stayed in battle, tankers departed. Lavender told his story with deep-seated resignation: "We had moved only a few hundred yards when a German anti-tank gun fired on our tanks[,] which were moving abreast of us on the road below. . . . We continued on without our tanks." The infantry's presence was required always; that of the tankers seemed sporadic and always conditional. Medic William Tsuchida told of a fight near the Saar Basin against German pillboxes, "a mess of concrete and steel":

> . . . [Our] demolition squad crawled up with TNT on their backs and blew the door in. And the infantry guys took a beating while they did it. Even the tanks had pulled back after their firing point-blank at the pillboxes had failed. But this one company of guys with just rifles had to stick it out. You figure it out. We can't.[81]

The artillery's support of the infantry was massive, constant, and critical. No factor was more important to success in Europe than the infantry's ability to call down artillery fire to break up German attacks or to cripple German resistance to its own assaults. Foot soldiers generally recognized the relationship, comprehended its importance, and were grateful. Often they expressed, at least to one another, their relief that the artillery had been able to extricate them from a trap or reduce the danger to one of their withdrawals by interposing between them and oncoming enemy an impenetrable barrier of destructive power.[82]

Still, aggravation, crystallizing around certain kinds of episodes, persisted. Batteries arrived in the midst of infantry, set up, shelled the enemy, and quickly withdrew—leaving the foot soldiers to absorb the counterbattery fire. (When each morning in Belgium a British twenty-five-pounder rushed up, fired ten rounds, and scurried away, an infantryman-mechanic one day removed its mobile unit's rotor arm, thereby forcing the artillerymen to sample the ripostes of the German 88s to which they daily exposed the ground soldiers. The infantry "weren't troubled again.") Then, too, American artillerymen committed errors, in calculation or communication, that inflicted casualties on American infantry. Such lapses triggered outrage: *"Our* *own artillery* is coming in *on us!*" Particularly infuriating were instances when, during full-scale bombardments, single pieces were improperly ranged and the short-shelling that was wounding and killing GIs was not stopped because, amid so many cannon, the offender could not be located nor the whole barrage halted.[83]

Finally, there were materiél shortages that infantrymen, understandably but unjustifiably, blamed on artillerymen. Russell Weigley has described the situation: "Various basic calibers of artillery ammunition were in scarce supply in northwest Europe from soon after D-Day and virtually throughout the rest of the war. American corps and division commanders repeatedly requested allocations of artillery ammunition for bombardments to precede attacks and could not get what they wanted." This problem filtered to foxholes in stories of artillerymen who, having fired a few rounds at advancing enemy and just found the range, then told the infantry: "Sorry, we have used up our quota for today."[84]

Still, as with armor, it was less what the artillery did or failed to do and more the other arm's relationship to the fighting that agitated infantrymen. The foot soldier, conceded a rifleman who fought on Guadalcanal, "[envied] the Artilleryman, a thousand yards to his rear, [with all] the additional safety and comforts back there." Such envy frequently quickened into anger—and sometimes into disdain. Combat medic Keith Winston told those at home that while battle losses in the 3d Division had turned over front-line soldiers five to seven times, an attached artillery unit had suffered "only one casualty in ten months of combat—and this from their own ack-ack. This is not hearsay, this is fact—from the [artillery] boys themselves. They're also called combat boys and get the same battle star credit for combat as the doughboy who sleeps in a wet foxhole risking his life every second." In the Pacific theater, William Manchester was persuaded, there was "a certain fairness—if anything in battle can be fair—in one rifleman fighting another. Each [has] a chance. . . . But there [is] something grotesque and outrageous about a man safely behind fortifications, miles away, pulling a lanyard and killing other men who cannot see him, let alone reach him." But infantrymen did not truly wish that the artillery receive less recognition or suffer higher casualties or kill the enemy in some more equitable fashion; they were simply deploring once again what they were believed was the war's maldistribution of sacrifice, with their own lives the forfeit.[85]

Contact with the Air Force was more complex than with armor or artillery, and far less frequent. In general, air actions were beyond the front-line soldier's range of vision—and when they were close enough to see, they were close enough to do him injury. Again, another arm's mistakes claimed their victims largely among foot soldiers. From the Philippines: "Not long after moving inland we set up . . . in a small Lingayen town. We were sleeping peacefully when we heard sirens, a roar, and machine guns. One of our planes got mixed up in the moonlight and buzzed up and down the highway tearing up a convoy of our trucks . . . [with] tragic consequences. . . . A few days later we watched as Mustangs dive-bombed a village tucked into a copse of trees. . . . Unknown to the careless pilots, our own soldiers had moved into the village and were being killed and wounded by the attack." From Germany: "Then suddenly something went wrong. We heard a fast rate of fire from multiple guns. . . . We looked up and there was one of our own planes diving with his guns blazing, . . . strafing our area. . . . The pilot [then] came in from east to west and dropped one bomb[,] . . . zoomed around . . . [and dropped] a second bomb."[86]

Such episodes generated infantry fury—and violent fluctuations of attitude. Lieutenant Paul Boesch and his comrades near Brest

> watched in awe . . . as [our P-39s and P-47s] delivered huge demolition bombs, smaller fragmentation bombs, machine-gun fire, and Napalm bombs which exploded in a great, spectacular gush of flaming oil. The planes zoomed low over our heads as they streaked for Jerry's lines to support our attacking units, and we were loud in our praise of the airmen we had so often vilified during training because we thought they had an easy life. Taking back most of the mean things we had said about them we were ready to admit they were our allies. We were even ready to admit out loud that they were soldiers, which was quite a concession for infantrymen.

But then—

> Just as we were shouting the airmen's praises without restriction, a pair of Thunderbolts roared out of the sky. To our horror we could see their bombs release and come screaming straight at us. . . . [They] landed about a hundred yards away with terrific blasts. I had no sooner scrambled shakily to my feet and checked my platoon . . . when the P-47s returned to strafe. . . . The planes zipped past, spitting blatant messages of death. . . . We stood up, brushed off and hardly had time to cuss before two others roared out of the sky on a bombing run. Again we hugged the earth . . .

Those fellow soldiers of the air instantaneously became "those crazy bastards [who] are after us." "God bless our Air Corps, but . . ." "We'll kill the dumb bastards if they do it again." A soldier in the 104th Division chidingly called several Air Force officers members of the "Ninth Luftwaffe." They had killed more Americans than Germans, he claimed, and thus ought to be awarded Iron Crosses.[87]

Tragic incidents provided occasion for infantry to recapitulate the whole slate of their grievances against airmen, for they were convinced that they sacrificed far more and were remunerated far less than pilots and their crews. Airmen, after all, returned "home" after every mission, while, in infantryman Orval Faubus's testy words, "for the front-line soldier there is no surcease from danger and hardship." At airbases, growled rifleman John George, "men are usually sure of a cot to sleep on and warm food to eat." In early 1944, Ernie Pyle visited an Air Force facility in Italy.

> Now our airmen have wood stoves in their rooms, they sleep in sleeping bags on folding cots, they have shelves to put their things on, they have electric light, they eat at tables, sitting on stools, and have an Italian boy to clear the dishes away. They have an Italian barber, and their clothes are clean and pressed. They have a small recreation room with soldier-drawn murals on the walls. They can go to a nearby town of an evening and see American movies, in theaters taken over by the Army. They can have dates with nurses. They can play cards. They can read by good light in a warm room.

Pyle considered pilots "as a class . . . the gayest people in the Army. When they came back from a mission they were usually full of high spirits. And when they sat around together . . . nine-tenths of their conversation was exuberant and full of howling jokes. There was no grimness in their conduct to match that of the infantrymen in the line."[88]

One day a Marine fighter pilot over Rabaul, the Japanese base on New Britain, cast himself as an action hero and was immediately joined on the squadron's communications net by others no less familiar with comic books and radio serials. "I'm the Green Hornet! Bzzzzzzz! Bzzzzzzz! Watch me sting this Jap." . . . "Here comes Jack Armstrong, the A-a-a-all American Boy! Rat-a-taaaaaat! Rat-a-taaaaaat!" "Which way'd they go, Sheriff? Thataway, pardner. Yippeeeeeee! The Lone Ranger rides again!" . . . "Dick Tracy's the name. Flat-top . . . you're a goner—Rat-a-a-taat! Rat-a-taaaaaaaaa!" It was the sort of fun that infantrymen thought the daily fare of American fighter pilots. Ernie Pyle's cautionary note—"Don't get the wrong impression. Their life is not luxurious. At home we wouldn't consider it adequate. It has the security of walls and doors, but it's a dog's life at that"—must have had line soldiers wondering, if that was a dog's life, what lower-order existence was theirs in the Liri Valley? Anger was inevitable. Combat soldiers who stared at aircraft passing overhead and were convinced that their pilots would, in an hour's time, be showered, shaved, shining in clean clothes, and hailing a taxi to Cairo, Rome, or London, called flyers the "Brylcreem Boys."[89]

To the infantryman, ground warfare was impossibly chaotic, while the airman's life appeared neatly ordered and almost completely governable during as well as between combat missions. From the ground, bomber formations looked faultlessly patterned, so precise and tidy, and the movements of fighter aircraft carried equal appeal for the opposite reason: their great swoops, tight turns, and steep dives seemed to trace with drama the pilot's ability—and freedom—to act exactly as he willed.

Airmen, ground soldiers were certain, received for their less strenuous war lives far more than their share of pay, promotions, and citations. Infantry lieutenant George Wilson of the Army's 4th Division respected the Air Force's "awesomely effective job," but he never ceased to resent airmen's comfortable lives and "extra pay." A colonel in the 35th Division protested flyers' "double pay for flying, while the Infantry, with the hardest lot of all, gets nothing extra no matter what they do." Air Force promotions, by infantry standards, came early and often. A Mauldin cartoon depicted a neatly dressed, curly-haired, adolescent Air Force colonel moving excitedly to embrace a scruffy infantry private whom he greeted as "Uncle Willie!" Another pictured a crewman explaining to Willie and Joe, loaded up and ready to emplane, that "Ya might hafta catch a boat. One of them kids ya chased off th' field wuz the pilot." Asked by a replacement why aircraft had not destroyed a German roadblock holding back the infantry's advance, a sergeant in Audie Murphy's platoon adopted the tone common to ground soldiers. "Are you kidding? The air force is taking the day off to run off a new batch of medals. Bunch of flyers knocked out a Jerry latrine day before yesterday and go gliding home through the wild blue yonder to get their medals. And what do you know? There wasn't a medal left. Plumb broke the spirit of them flyers. No, we can't depend on the air corps."[90]

There was reality beneath the infantrymen's complaints of inequitable treatment, although some of the disparities reflected Army remissness rather than Air Force advantage. Promotions and thus pay were more generous in the air arm, and the gap in supplemental compensation remained unclosed even after Congress authorized combat pay for ground soldiers. Recognition, too, came easier to airmen; a study of awards for performance in the European theater in spring 1945 revealed that airmen received fourteen times as many medals as combat troops.[91]

Yet some of the better treatment of airmen was carefully considered. The Air Corps monitored far better than the ground forces the physical condition and psychological equipoise of its personnel. Flight surgeons watched for symptoms of psychoneurosis, made prompt diagnoses, and ordinarily introduced timely therapy. That institutional concern was rooted in the Air Force's desire to guard against explosions of aberrant behavior with far greater potential for damage, jeopardizing highly trained crews and costly machinery, than were those of unhinged infantrymen; the result was a program, far more diligent than the Army's, to identify and pull from combat those close to collapse. Sometimes rests sufficed to restore injured psyches. Sometimes transfers to other kinds of aircraft or to other theaters or to instructor positions brought relief. (Rare was the infantryman, infirm or fit, who was thought to have gained from combat any knowledge sufficiently important to be imparted to others.) Finally, the sting of every disparity was intensified by the American public's idolization of pilots as leather-jacketed, bescarfed, brave, rollicking hero-adventurers.[92]

Still, though there were grounds for some of the infantry's complaints, others rested on profound misconceptions. Foot soldiers understood airmen's lives less accurately than flyers comprehended the experience of ground combat. Although there existed an Air Corps–infantry exchange program in which, as infantryman James Fry described it, "some of our officers visited Air organizations in the rear, and Air Force officers visited the front . . . an excellent plan to improve understanding and cooperation," it included no enlisted men and drew far more air than infantry participants.[93]

Even aviators whose comprehension relied on views from thousands of feet up thought that they saw enough to prefer their war—and to sympathize with those below. Bert Stiles glanced from the cockpit of his B-17 on D-Day and felt a powerful compassion for "those poor bastards down on the beach." "[M]ost of the time you don't live with death in a [Flying Fortress] the way they must in a ditch." Flyers appreciated, too, the comfort they returned to each day. Slumped in his chair contemplating a just-completed mission in support of ground forces imperiled by the Germans' Ardennes offensive of Christmas 1944, a pilot suddenly spoke out: "I was just thinking. All of us guys flying planes are such lucky pricks. We go through hell but then we come back to a bed and a hot meal and a good night's sleep. But those poor goddam bastards in the fucking infantry . . ." Ten thousand miles away, air gunner John Ciardi's ruminations were similar: "It's the boys in the foxholes that are sweating out this war. I'm part of the exclusive Saipan Hunt Club—hunting parties twice weekly (weather and mechanics permitting)."[94]

Most of this fellow feeling was lost on infantrymen who, seeing airmen only from afar, regularly exaggerated the contrasts between ground war and air war and underestimated the latter's costs. Seldom were they aware of the price paid by those aviators who alone carried the war to the enemy in Western Europe between mid-August 1942 and early June 1944. "Our own war . . . the exclusive war," Stiles called it. Air crews, explained B-17 pilot Philip Ardery, "felt that they had borne the whole war [there] for a long time, and they longed for assistance on the ground to speed things up." This was more than a matter of misery seeking company; bombing raids, unbearably costly during the summer and fall of 1943, brought air crews to near desperation. The Germans were able to destroy 30.5 percent of the 177 B-24s sent to bomb Ploesti; 19.1 percent of the bombers that attacked Regensburg-Schweinfurt; 26.2 percent of those returning to Schweinfurt. At the same time, James Doolittle, commander of the Eighth Air Force, became convinced that it was "wasteful . . . to send crews home just when they had become full-fledged professionals, combat-hardened," and he consequently increased the number of missions requisite for relief from twenty-five to thirty to thirty-five. (It was later extended to fifty.) Doolittle conceded that the changes were "highly unpopular at first," but he claimed that "the air crews came to agree as our loss rate steadily decreased and the chances of survival correspondingly increased." Yet, little improvement appeared before the early summer of 1944 and Doolittle's measures at first simply heightened the airmen's despair.[95]

B-24 pilot John Vietor estimated that in 1943 and early 1944, "it was seldom that more than ten percent of the squadrons flying from England would complete the twenty-five missions necessary for the Lucky Bastard Ribbon (Distinguished Flying Cross) and return to the States." In April 1944, the Army Air Corps' commanding officer, Henry "Hap" Arnold, warned the Joint Chiefs that "the massive likelihood of death was beginning to affect his crews—the loss rate was currently 85% of the total force over a tour of twenty-five sorties." The historian Michael Sherry calculated that, overall, only 27 percent of air crews were able to complete twenty-five raids over Germany. Ultimately, 52,000 of America's 290,000 battle deaths were those of air personnel, and the loss rate of bomber crews reached a level exceeded only by the infantry.[96]

Pilots were seldom told theater statistics, but they counted losses within their own units and were desolated. William Cubbins' B-24 squadron arrived in Italy during the spring of 1944. "Within less than four months, [it] had lost over 100 percent of [its] normal complement of aircraft and crews. . . . The original . . . crews had dwindled to a few. None had completed the required fifty missions, and air crew prospects for survival were grim." "Mathematically," Philip Ardery decided, "no one had a chance of getting through a tour." John Muirhead, whose war would end when his B-17 was shot down and he was made a prisoner of war, alternated between slight hope and no hope. "Nine missions was maturity; up to fifteen or more was to be regarded with awe; beyond that was magic, luck to be touched, to be near and favored beyond anything else." "Completing fifty missions was too implausible to even consider." "Our lives were defined by a line from the present to a violent moment that must come for each of us." Worrying before every mission whether he would return, Ardery wondered each morning whether he should open early the Christmas presents that had arrived from home.[97]

The actual air losses were of course concealed on grounds of military security and morale, so infantrymen retained a sense of the disparity of their own sacrifice. To them, it continued to appear as if all those in the Air Corps could "look forward to a trip home. All they have to do is complete so many missions. [But] what do we have to look forward to?" Ernie Pyle spent most of his time with the Air Force in the company of fighter pilots and chose not to go along on long-distance bombing runs; continuing to write from the infantry perspective, he persisted in his sanguine views of life in the air arm. Air personnel came to the war zone, fought with a zest and ease denied ground soldiers, stayed a relatively short time, and, with inappreciable exceptions, survived to be transferred beyond harm. "It would be unusual for a combat airman to be overseas more than a year, at the present rate." He cited the Air Corps "system of relieving pilots after a certain number of missions," as if that were simply a matter of course. He visited a squadron of tactical fighter-bombers and weighed its odds. Fifty pilots had entered combat six months earlier; twelve had become casualties, thirty-five had returned home, and the last three were about to follow. His mistaken conclusion: "[A] new pilot . . . has about a seventy-five percent chance of coming through safely. . . ." And even those few who died maintained an advantage over dog soldiers: "A man approached death rather decently in the Air Forces," as someone who, well-fed and clean-shaven, "was at the front only a few hours a day . . . came back to something approximating a home . . . and still had some acquaintance with orderly life," not someone like the ground soldier, who "had to become half beast [to try] to survive."[98]

The view from the ground was misleading. True, the time over the target was brief, but it was terrifying. "We were under [antiaircraft] fire for twelve minutes," recalled B-24 gunner James McMahon. "It is the most terrible experience you can have. It is just like going 'over the top' into an artillery barrage. I saw two [other American aircraft] blow up this day, and one go down by fighters." B-17 pilot John Bennett likened a bomber over a German city to a person burdened by two heavy cans of gasoline trying to run rapidly through a dark alley while thugs aimed firecrackers at the open containers. Sometimes the flak bursts were so dense that a pilot "had the feeling he could step out and walk on them," and the rare ground soldier who became their target was as likely to be terrified as an Air Force officer caught in a mortar barrage. One English ground-signals lieutenant, Anthony Cotterell, profoundly regretted that he had agreed to go along on a night RAF raid against Frankfurt; he found it "maddening . . . that [amidst the flak] the pilot didn't seem to make any effort to go any faster or dodge about. We just mooned drearily forward."[99]

Like most ground soldiers, Cotterell supposed that flyers were always able to exercise more control over their fates than could infantrymen, but bomber crews singled out feelings of helplessness as among the most frequent and daunting of their reactions. While gunners worked frenziedly to ward off enemy fighters, pilots had to hold their planes rigidly in formation, mooning drearily forward and praying that paths of aircraft and shells or bullets would not intersect. "It makes a guy so damned mad," McMahon protested, "and you can't do anything about it." Bennett too deplored that "the bomber pilot can't fight back, but must sit there and take it." Moreover, however short the time over target, the missions themselves were often protracted; the average round trip from the Marianas to Japan consumed fourteen hours, from English bases to Germany eight hours. Mechanical failure was common. Would a malfunction send the ship hurtling to earth or sea? Would the damage inflicted by flak or fighter prove fatal during the long return? Pilots could only fly on. And even when one's own craft seemed to be operating adequately, "you feel so . . . helpless when the others get in trouble. . . . I could spare any of them one engine and five hundred gallons of gas if I could just get it to them. It makes you feel so damn helpless."[100]

The pilots' sense of their own powerlessness, real despite the immense destructive power their bombers released upon the earth, was the root of at least one of the disconnections between bomber and fighter pilots, all of which remained beyond the ken of the infantry. As John Bennett told it, the bomber pilot's incapacity to return blows explained "why there is such a difference between the bomber and fighter boys. The men in this latter group can match their skill against the enemy. [The fighter pilot] carries a club of his own with which to fight back. I do not find the light-hearted devil-may-care spirit on the bomber station. . . . Our men go about their grim business with sober determination." "We are all afraid. . . ." Infantry, then, did not understand that bomber pilots might envy fighter pilots as ground soldiers envied all flyers. Muirhead was one of the wistful: "P-38s slid over the formation, drifting toward the southeast. Every time I saw them, I felt the same yearning to be as free as they were, to move as they did in soft, curling patterns above the bombers, or to roll away in a flash of motion as though abandoned to some impulse of delight. The sky was more a playground for them than a battlefield. . . . I knew they fell and died as we did, but theirs must have been a brighter heaven." Nor could ground troops appreciate that such pilots sometimes fought against that cavalier imagery. When a B-17 group commander in Europe, leafing through an American magazine, came upon an advertisement whose banner asked: "Who's afraid of the new Focke-Wulf?"* he clipped it, signed his name, and posted it. After all of his pilots, in avowal of their own fear, had added their signatures, he mailed the page to the advertiser.[101]

Beginning in spring 1944, the fundamental situation confronting American bombers over Germany changed rapidly. The arrival of the 108-gallon drop-tank extended decisively the range of the P-51 Mustang and for the first time permitted bomber missions round-trip fighter protection. This development, conjoining with the Germans' failure to replace experienced pilots who had died and the enemy's dearth of aviation fuel, so sapped the Luftwaffe's power that bomber losses in daylight raids fell from 20-25 percent to 6 percent. Still, veteran pilots who had begun their bomber tours with little fighter protection were unable to shake off their consciousness of acute peril. When Stiles' crew completed the required number of missions, "They all seemed to be in a quiet daze. . . . [They] wouldn't believe it for hours, maybe days."[102]

Nor was there much lightening of the burden borne by B-29 crews in the Pacific. John Ciardi, evincing no less helplessness than crewmen in Europe, spoke of the new dangers to which the shift early in 1945 to incendiary bombs had exposed him: "The new policy is to go in lower and lower. The object—as it should be—is to wipe out targets. But the terrific underlining of our complete expendability . . . doesn't help much. . . . I'm frankly afraid of these lowered-altitude runs. And I'm frankly afraid that Wing's refusal to tell us how many missions we're to fly means that we're here to be used up. . . . I do my job and keep cool. But this waiting to be expended does me down." "We are motes in a current. . . . And we wait with dread fringing all our consciousness." "We were [over Japan] to destroy . . . factories and Japanese factories had a price tag attached. We were the price and neither longing nor the will to live mattered in the final balance."[103]

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*A German high-altitude interceptor

Even at a distance, a few combat soldiers of unusual perceptiveness were able to grasp some of these strains in airmen's lives. Henry Giles, learning that the man who had married his fiancée's daughter was about to become a bomber pilot, thought carefully about life in the air:

> . . . brother, I don't envy him. It takes guts to sit up there and ride through that flak and I'm damned sure I don't have that kind. I've watched them plow through when it was as thick as a carpet under them and you couldn't see how any of them could make it. And some didn't. I've never watched one of our planes fall that it didn't make me sick at my stomach. The worst is when they spin down in flames. Somebody is being fried to a crackling and he hasn't got a chance. I don't begrudge a single one of those boys his easy life between missions, for when they fly it's rough.

Lieutenant Paul Boesch was another ground soldier whom events propelled to contemplate the indecency of the airmen's deaths rather than the decency of their living conditions. With his unit committed to the siege of Brest, he and his men watched as American squadrons bombed the German defenses.

> One day we had two separate attacks by . . . B-17s. My boys were so elated . . . that they got out of their foxholes and cheered lustily as the bombs fell in clusters toward the German positions. The cheers suddenly caught in our throats however as we saw one of the planes swerve into another. . . . Both . . . ships seemed to fall apart in the air, and pieces hurried earthward as harbingers of the remains. It seemed to take forever for the main body of the planes to crash to earth, and yet not a parachute appeared. [Untutored] as we were in the problems of the men in the sky, it seemed that some of the crews should have been able to escape, and we prayed to the last for the billowing silk that would indicate they had succeeded. The tragedy made us feel closer to the men of the Air Corps and impressed on us that we had no monopoly on death.[104]

But an understanding of airmen's lives—that there was a frightfulness in trying to withstand flak and in contending with death by fire; that access to civilian amenities could touch off longing and almost as much pain as pleasure; that there were in airmen's lives battle aging, sleeplessness, and combat nerves mirroring their own desperation—seldom entered the consciousness of ground soldiers. They could see only dimly the realities of the lives of bomber crews, and they continued to covet what they believed to be the relative ease of the air war. James Fry described with assurance the views of his fellow infantrymen:

> We were envious of airmen. Although we appreciated the courage it took to face enemy anti-aircraft fire, the average infantry combat soldier would have gladly exchanged places with the men [of] the Air Force. Each aviator's brief bombing mission, if successful, ended up with the crew far in [the] rear of the battle lines. There the dangers of the day could be followed by a congenial drink under conditions that would permit one to forget the whole grim affair[,] to relax mind and muscle.

Fry went on, as would many infantrymen, to contrast the civilized smoothness of air effort with the onerousness of infantry life: foot soldiers seldom received hot food or fresh clothing; they slept on the ground; they were never spared awareness "of the imminence of enemy action and violent death." For them, "there would be no chance to relax, no opportunity to forget what had taken place." So once again, continuities in the two experiences of warmaking went unrecognized, and obvious contrasts worked to raise an envy and resentment intensifying the infantry soldier's sense of isolation from the other branches of the American military.[105]

The final stamp on the infantry's conviction that it had been set apart was its estrangement from the high command of its own army.

Some disaffection was inevitable, for there were in all armies opposed perspectives, purposes, and powers in top and bottom ranks. Whereas those with combat experience were moving to define "victory" in terms of personal survival, for their commanders it continued to mean the pursuit of military success, battle and campaign triumphs that envisioned and accepted the destruction of certain numbers of platoons. But a high command victory was no victory to the GI whose death it encompassed, and surviving soldiers found increasingly remote and irrelevant prior assurances that battlefield victories promised the earliest possible return home. Their focus narrowed drastically to whatever they deemed would sustain continued existence; and to that, larger military success and failure were almost equally subordinate. Margaret Bourke-White became unhappy with those many infantrymen who failed to develop "a vision of their contribution to the basic scheme of battle," but here she ignored that in the distillation of their concerns to survival they had excluded interest in the cause, in developments in other theaters, and ultimately in combat beyond their own purview. Such tensions found lodgement in every army.[106]

There was, however, in the U.S. Army's policy governing relief from battle a problem of greater magnitude, one that created a divide greater than in the militaries of other nations. At the outset, the government's Victory Program had foreseen an army of 215 divisions; but with the nation's focus first on the war of industrial production, there materialized only eighty-nine—a total, as it proved, dangerously close to the minimum number necessary to win the war. With so slender a margin, the high command thought there was no option but to commit its divisions to combat indefinitely and to maintain their strength through a system of individual replacements. But casualties in Europe exceeded estimates, and not even continual service in the line could hold off a crisis in the late summer of 1944: the shortage of combat riflemen became acute. Indeed, S. L. A. Marshall claimed, extravagantly, that on August 6 "the entire reinforcement pool for infantry forces in Europe— . . . infantrymen ashore in France and ready to go into battle—consisted of one lone rifleman." Only the very rapid conversion of manpower from antiaircraft units, from Army and Air Force support units, and from ASTP* units of young soldiers enrolled in American universities—all of them trained or being trained for duties elsewhere—bridged the gap, often with tragic results for many so ill-grounded in infantry tactics.[107]

Almost all other armies established systems of rotating units out of the line. Even the Wehrmacht, with enemy armies pressing on the homeland from east and west, managed practically to the war's end to withdraw combat formations for days and weeks of refitting and relaxation or at least respite. An English officer in North Africa made clear what departure from the line, with its opportunity to clean and rest oneself, meant to his tankers: "The psychological magic of it moved us right out of the desert and its battles into some oasis of the mind in which just being able to wash and change our underclothes produced as complete a metamorphosis as being suddenly transposed to a breakfast in bed in a luxury hotel. . . ." GIs gained only brief pauses when their regiment was that one of the division's three held in reserve near but not on the line, and hard-used divisions were sometimes, but infrequently, shifted to quiet sectors. In November 1944, the U.S. Army established a program of recuperation leave in the United States but its numerical limit—5,500 men a month—opened it to no more than one man in each company and assured that it would be greeted with derisive calculations of the eight, nine, or ten years that would be required to provide everyone in the unit a furlough at home.[108]

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*Army Specialized Training Program

In the early stages of the war many infantrymen were able to accept such high command reasoning as that which Brigadier General Theodore Roosevelt, Jr., set out for his wife in a letter from North Africa in March 1943: "In this war no units in the line get relief. We just go on and on. I believe that the very fierceness of this fighting means that later resistance will be softened." Many ground soldiers, however, soon decided that they could not take the long view, that the "later" of diminished enemy opposition would arrive too late to help them evade death; and they were in any case appalled to realize that high command policy offered them no alternative less painful and costly than a serious wound or a nervous collapse. Said one infantry scout who fought in Sicily: "Men in our division gave up all hope of being relieved. They thought the Army intended to keep them in action until everybody was killed[,] that [the Army] would simply replace casualties. . . . All the men have hope of getting back, but most of the hope is that you'll get hit someplace that won't kill you. That's all they talk about." And even that hope soon evaporated: "You give up. You feel that you'll never get back anyway. You just try to postpone it as long as possible." Bitterness prevailed. "They stick us here," cried Irgang's friend Brinker, "and here we stay until we are either burned out or shot to hell." "It is a world no civilian can ever know," Orval Faubus wrote home. "Civilians can hide from the storm and wait and pray for its passing. We must go into the hell and finish the job. With sickened souls, despairing hearts and hate in our minds we must stick it out to our finish (in one way or another) or the war's finish. There must be a hell hereafter for men who willfully make such hells here for us."[109]

During the campaign to wrest the Huertgen Forest from the Germans, company commander Paul Boesch was ordered to assault the town of Huertgen. He protested: extended combat had reduced the unit to less than one-quarter strength and those who had survived were exhausted. Battalion reiterated its order but did send reinforcements, two squads of engineers armed with flamethrowers. Boesch quickly organized an attack, but when one of the engineers fired his weapon prematurely and alerted the enemy, overpowering German machine-gun fire wounded two Americans and left Boesch no option but to withdraw the men to their foxholes.

That night the engineers' section leader approached Boesch. "Lieutenant, isn't it time for us to go back? My men are getting cold in these holes." Boesch did not hesitate: "My men have been cold in the same kind of holes for about two weeks now, Sergeant. I expect to use you and your men later tonight[;] you'd better stand by." The sergeant retired—but was soon back. "Lieutenant, I'd like to take my men now and return to the company area." Boesch, irritated, replied that the assault was imminent, that the engineers were to have an important role, that they could not be spared. "Well, gee whiz, Lieutenant, they didn't tell me we were going on no suicide mission." Boesch bristled: "What the hell do you think about the rest of us? Don't you think we get a little sick of suicide missions too?" "But Lieutenant," came the sergeant's reply, "you all are *infantry.*"

> I sighed out loud. My God, we were infantry. That apparently meant [that] we were a race apart. Maybe we weren't supposed to feel, to hurt, to shiver, to be frightened, to react like other human beings. They were engineers, supply clerks, quartermasters, signalmen, ordnance repairmen—they were above this kind of miserable thing. But as for us, we were infantry.
>
> I started to tell the man to get back to his hole, that I wanted to hear no more from him, that he and his men had better be ready when I gave the word to move forward. Then I changed my mind. These men had tasted too much warm food and slept in too many dry spots to be of any real use to us. To hell with them.
>
> "You're goddamned right we're infantry," I said. "As for you, you take your men and your fancy equipment and get the hell back to the rear where you belong. We want no part of whiners. We'll get along without you. Don't you worry about that."[110]

The soldier's exuberant, impatient aggressiveness of those days before battle; the certainty that he would control all that befell him; the ability to dismiss any possibility of his own death—combat toppled them all. He could then trace in his own worn face and increasingly anxious thought the advance of a new and fearsome vulnerability. He looked to the other arms for help, but their seeming inability to improve the odds confronting him further devitalized him—by pressing on him first a sense of the infantry's isolation and then of its expendability.